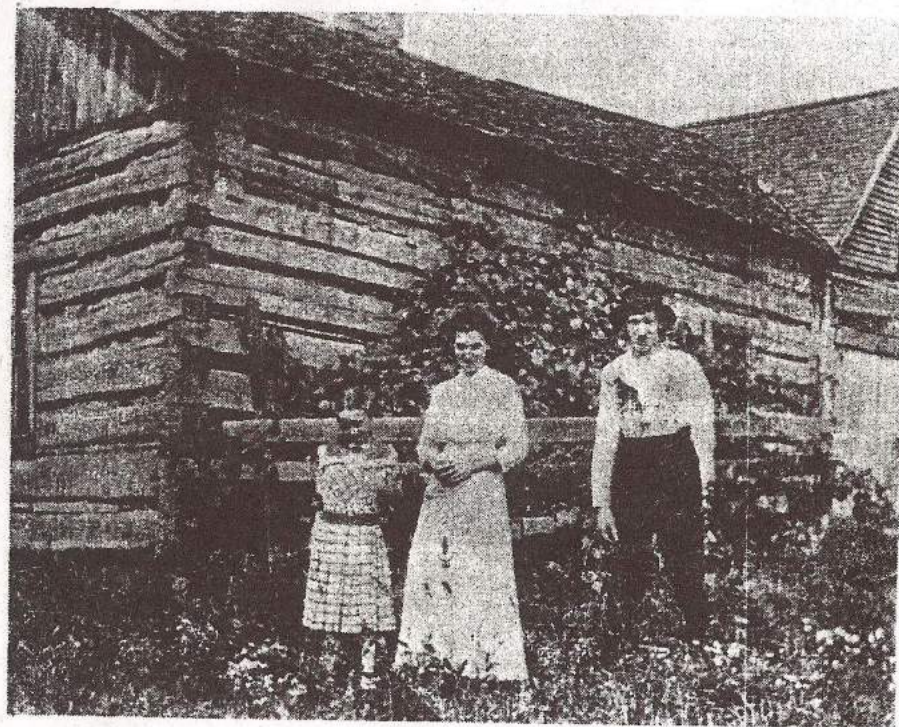


HOUSE PARTY



Reminiscences by Traditional Musicians
and Square Dance Callers
in Michigan's Thumb Area

Edited by Stephen R. Williams

Museum of Arts and History, Port Huron

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Introduction

Music and the old-fashioned square dance have been integral parts of the social history of Eastern Michigan for many generations. The house party was a major means of entertainment and social interaction until the 1940's. At that time, for many reasons, neighborhood fiddlers and guitarists set aside their instruments, and callers shelved their age-old square dance figures in the recesses of their memories. Recently these traditions have been revived through the efforts of various organizations, such as the Original Michigan Fiddlers' Association and the Port Huron Museum of Arts and History.

The musical jamborees and the Museum's monthly "Rap & Jam Sessions" have stirred reminiscences of the old house parties. Often heard is the comment, "We haven't had a house party in thirty years!" Folk musicians, who have not touched their fiddles in that length of time, are now sharing their musical skills with youngsters, who are fascinated with the simple joy found in the music which is historically rooted in their own home area.

This important activity has been taking place for a few years, but without any serious effort being made to record, study and inter-

pret the folkloric significance of Eastern Michigan music, musicians and callers. This publication is the first step toward such scholarly documentation.

In recent months, interviews were recorded with twelve musicians and callers in Eastern Michigan. These persons were asked to describe their memories of house parties, barn dances, hall dances, and other musical activities. They were also requested to explain the personal significance which music has held for them through the years.

Their stories are presented here, using the words of the speakers. It has been necessary to condense and edit the transcribed interviews for greater clarity. With only a few editorial inclusions, which are set in brackets ([]), the words of the speakers read as if you are sitting and chatting with them in their homes.

There are many other persons who have equally informative stories to tell. It is our sincere hope that this publication is just the beginning of much more research to be conducted in this rich field of Michigan's folk culture. If, in reading this book, you find yourself remembering similar times and events, talk to someone about them. Share your stories with your children, grandchildren or friends. We, at the Museum of Arts and History, would be glad to hear from you, too!

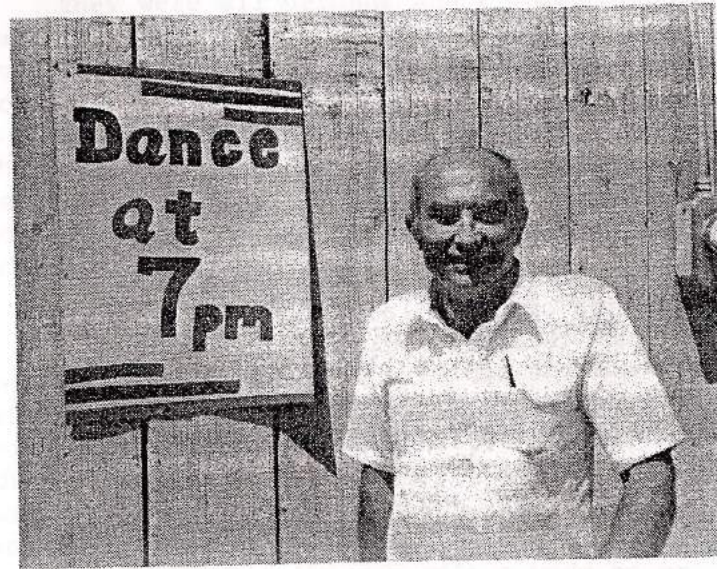
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Glen Westphal

— caller

This second printing of *House Party: Reminiscences by Traditional Musicians and Square Dance Callers in Michigan's Thumb Area* is dedicated to the memory of Eldon Field (July 9, 1909 - March 22, 1983).



Glen Westphal knows a lot of the very old square dance calls. He is forever coming up with a different one that has not been heard in years.

Glen refers to himself as a thoroughbred German, and his family has a long tradition of music and dance. In his story, Glen colorfully describes the house parties of his youth.

Glen Westphal:

It's turn the opposite lady a half,
And now the one you love,
And now the opposite lady a half,
And then your turtle dove.

Join your hands and circle a half.
The half go right and left.
And take your lady by the wrist
And lead her up to the next.

Turn the opposite lady a half,
And now the one you love.
And now the opposite lady a half.
And then your turtle dove.
Join your hands and circle a half.
The half go right and left.
And take your lady by the wrist
And lead her up to the next.

Turn the opposite lady a half,
And now the one you love.
And now the opposite lady a half,
And then your turtle dove.
Join your hands and circle a half.
The half go right and left.
And take your lady by the wrist
And all go allemande left.

And grand right and left.

I like that one. That's [to the tune of]
"The Head Two Gents Cross Over," and you
play that same tune - the same first part
of it - over and over. My dad used to call
it, and my uncle would play it.

My one uncle called. My Grandfather Albrecht
called. My Grandfather Westphal played the accor-
dion, and my Grandmother Westphal also played the
organ. My uncle played fiddle, and then there was
other fiddle players around the neighborhood. They
weren't real good, but they'd set in and play, and
you could make out what they were playing. But none
of them were professionals. Once in a while some-
body'd bring a guitar, but there wasn't too many
guitars in our neighborhood. Accordion, organ and

fiddle was about it. My Grandfather Albrecht called
square dances. Pretty near everybody could call.
Again, some was better than others, but pretty near
everybody would call.

They were all Germans and I guess 90% of them
came from pretty much the same part of the country
over in Germany. They talked the same German language.
So they had their house parties, and from what
I understand, that's the way it was in Germany.
They would get together over there and have a
party. Just a small community where there's a
dozen homes or two dozen homes, whatever it
would be, get together and have a party.

Wintertime more so than summertime,
because summertime you was harvesting and
planting. But occasionally right in the
summertime - didn't make a difference -
they'd have a party at least once a month even
in the summertime. But in the wintertime it
was every week. You were going to a party
every week. And if there wasn't a wedding or
wedding anniversary or a birthday party, they
didn't need an excuse. They just had a party.

This neighbor would tell that one, "There's
going to be a party over at Albrechts' this
Saturday night." I don't really say that you
got an invitation; you were just automatically
invited to a house party. If you heard it, that
was good enough. You were invited if you heard
about it. I know it seems kinda funny today,
but that's the way it was in our neighborhood.

After you got the chores done, and got the
horses harnessed, and got over there, it'd be 9
o'clock. And it would go till - oh, long as you
got home in time to do chores in the morning -
by 6 o'clock in the morning. Just roll up the
carpet, and push the furniture back. Even tear
the beds down in the bedroom; put them up against
the wall. The dining room table, in them days it

was an extension table, one that you could pull apart and set a thrasher crew at. I mean it would hold 15 - 20 people. It would be folded up as close as possible and pushed off in the corner, unless it would be taken into a small bedroom somewhere, and four guys would be playing cards on it. Some of the older ones used to play cards or checkers. But the room would be cleared for dancing. In our living room, you could get two sets in there, but normally one. Quite often the musicians and callers would play in the doorway. A lot of the older homes would have an archway between the living room and the dining room, or parlor and the living room. They used to have a parlor in them days, too. And they would set in the archway, and then they would have a dance in both rooms.

You'd see kids laying in the corners on a blanket. Nobody thought anything of it. Some of them would set. Others would go off in the corner and play dominos or whatever. And when they got tired, they'd lay them on the bed, or get a blanket in a corner of the floor, and lay them down. Kids were used to that. That's the way they were brought up back then. They didn't have to stay in their own crib or bed. My sister is four years younger than I am, and I can remember that we'd take her right with us to house parties. And I'd be maybe six - seven years old. She'd be a couple of years old, and she'd lay down and go to sleep anywhere.

Nobody had any money. Well, where could you find a night's entertainment any cheaper than for a loaf of bread, or a slab of bacon, or a kettle of beans, or whatever? The home that you went to did not furnish the food. Oh, they might, you know, furnish the butter or salt and pepper, something like that. But everybody brought something. And you'd have a party, and at midnight you'd have a lunch.

And the musicians - oh, once in a while they'd get fifty cents. They'd take up a collection, and different ones would kick in a nickel or a dime, and other people wouldn't. If they took up a collection, whatever money they got, they'd split it with the ones that played, which didn't amount to very much.

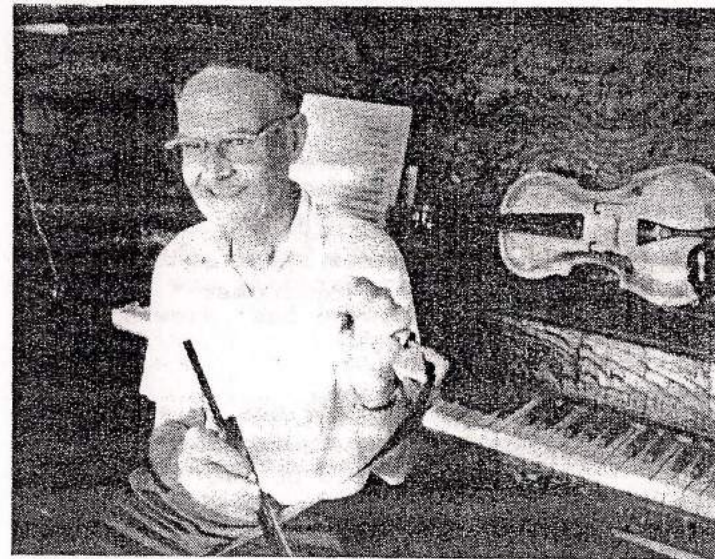
I can remember when one winter - I don't remember the date, but there was snow on the ground - that my dad hooked up a team of horses and a sleigh, and we went over to my Grandfather Albrecht's for their wedding anniversary. And we stopped and picked up Beams, another two families of Albrechts and Bingles, and Bartels, and Persails, all in a sleigh, and took them over to my grandparents', which was about five miles from my place. And we had a house party. I mean danced, and went on until the wee hours of the morning. Hooked the horses back up and go back home. At that time they blocked the cars up in the wintertime. But cars couldn't get through anyway, and they took the team and sleigh. And there was people from other directions. They came there the same way, team and sleigh. And it would be a whole sleigh load; I mean 25 - 30 - 40 people in a sleigh load.

One time we were at a house party, and my dad wasn't there. My grandfather was playing, and I was 13 years old. And there was no caller available, and they wanted to square dance. They just filled up these two rooms, and I stood up on a chair and called. That was my first time. I remember that. Scared to death. But I liked it well enough that I wanted to try it. And I didn't call every Saturday night after that, but that more or less broke the ice to where it made me feel like I can do it, if I have to. And then after the war, they started having hall parties up here in the township hall. And used to get me to call. Then I did put on dances up here at one time.

The war broke out and money got a little more plentiful, more cars in the community. The kids started driving to the shows in Sandusky and Port Huron. After the war, then dances started in halls and community buildings. Most of them was still the old-time dance. There used to be a hall in Lakeport. That was a modern dance. All round dances, all fox trots, and the younger crowd used to go there. And in Crosswell, down at the railroad track, they had the hall they called the Crosswell Arcadia. It was a big long hall, and every Saturday night they had old-time dances there. But after the war, house parties just faded away. ☐☐

Ralph Flowers

— fiddler, saw player



Ralph Flowers grew up in eastern Ohio, and moved to the Thumb Area as a young adult. He plays fiddle and musical saw, and dabbles with a variety of other instruments. Ralph still plays the best saw his father ever owned. Back in 1936, when Ralph was sent to fetch this saw to repair a sill, his father caught him trying to play some tunes on it. Ralph says his father was delighted, and gave him the saw, and told him to "keep at it."

Ralph fashioned a special handle to better manipulate the saw, and he made his own bow for it. This is indicative of Ralph's inventive nature. He is always coming up with new ideas and mechanical devices to make life a little easier. He built and lives in what is probably the only adobe house in the

Thumb, which, according to Ralph, has exceptional insulating properties. He recently built himself a fiddle, just to see if he could do it.

Ralph is a community-minded optimist. You will find him playing his fiddle and saw at any number of church programs, Senior Citizen centers and other charitable gatherings.

Ralph's story includes musical traditions other than the house party. He vividly remembers the barn dance, the shivaree, and some moments spent at home entertaining his wife prior to her passing.

Ralph Flowers:

There was a lady. She was a maiden lady - never married. She had this little farm probably about 12 - 15 acres. She always hired women to work on it. She never hired any men at all. She just didn't. Oh, I don't know - just didn't take to men.

But this one fall she was sick, and she couldn't get her corn in out of the field. Getting late - starting to get cold. Corn was cut and shocked in the field. And so a bunch of us young fellas we went to work. Had about four or five wagons and teams, and the rest of the fellas then went too. And they would load the stuff on our wagons, and took it in, and put it on her barn floor. Set it all around. Filled the barn right up with it. Well then, she didn't have that much. It wasn't like they do now. But we had five or six good loads. I remember we went back for more.

And then we went home, had our supper, got our girlfriends - and they had in the meantime made like a potluck lunch to have - and we went back after supper. I took my fiddle and another boy had a guitar. And we went, and we husked out that corn. Husked it all out. The ones that was fastest husking would be husking, and the others was carrying the corn and the fodder out, and setting the fodder up in the barnyard for her so she could get it. And the corn went in the crib. When we got done, we had real teamwork. Boy, everybody was pitching right in you know; going to work, and it was fun!

Everytime you found a red ear, why you got to kiss the prettiest girl in the place. Depend on which girl you thought was the prettiest, you see. It didn't always mean the same one all the time. Every once in a while you'd run across a red ear and the fun would start. Well, we got it all husked out and in the crib and everything all clean. Swept the floor up. And then we had our square dance.

Boy, we had a ball, played there until - oh, probably 12:00-1:00. Then we'd go home. But everybody just had a grand old time; and she just never got over that. It changed her whole attitude towards men, and she realized that it wasn't all bad. From then on, she would come to the parties and things like that, and really enjoyed herself. And she'd dance with us. But that really impressed her that we would want to do that - would come and do that with no charge or nobody looking for anything.

And of course there was weddings. Whenever there was a wedding, we always had a jamboree - or "shivaree" we called it. Take the team and wagon and go. And we'd get a whole gang - the whole neighborhood - on the wagon. And stop and get the bride and groom, if we could find them. Lots of time, the game was they'd try to hide from us - try to get away. But we'd slip up on them and catch them unawares, and take them on the wagon and go for a ride.

There was one time that this young couple got married, and they was living in a great big house. There was thirteen rooms in the house. It had been the old family home. And so we got there, and we started trying to find them. And it was hunting for a needle in a haystack. But there was a dinner bell up on a post there, so one of the guys got that down and he took that and started ringing that in the house and right up the stairs. Oh that was loud in the house! And there they was scooped down in a clothes closet. They really hid, I tell you! Even clothes piled over them, so they thought they was going to fool us. Thought they was going to get away, but we fooled them. We took them with us on to the wagon and drove around over the neighborhood for a while, singing songs and just having a good time, a party, shivaree. I'd have the fiddle along, playing along with the guy with his guitar, and we'd ride along on the wagon playing.

There was no drinking, or nothing like that you know. We just had a good time and then, when we got all around, come back around and drop them off at their place again. And it was just all in fun, and they enjoyed it as much as anybody.

But that was the game, to try to see if they could get away with it - hide from us, so we couldn't find them.

I didn't play too much after I got to Port Huron here for a while. I didn't have parties and stuff like that. But when my wife got ill, I couldn't leave her and go very much. Oh, I'd play the fiddle all the time, even when she was sick. And her favorite pastime was taking a piece of paper and pencil and writing down the name of the pieces as I played them. See how many I could play, and she'd have a list as long as your arm before I got through. She just liked to see how many I could play without stopping, and one right after another. She knew the names of pretty near most of them by doing that, you see. That was one of her favorite pastimes, setting in the evening doing that; just loved it. ☒☒

Eddie Kranz

—fiddler



Eddie Kranz is a smiling, friendly man who has spent his entire life on a farm deep in Michigan's Thumb. He and his wife, Agnes, are expert gardeners, and their dinner table boasts a variety of home canned produce. Eddie's deliberate fiddling style has a definite Canadian influence. He learned to play his instrument through the traditional process of observing others, and many of his early neighbors had Canadian roots. In later years Eddie enjoyed listening to Canadian fiddle music on the radio and records, which have served to expand his own repertoire. Eddie has taught himself to read written music, and he developed the ability to write his own fiddle tunes. One of Eddie's compositions follows his story.

Eddie Kranz:

This is a German settlement around here. They all came from Germany, see, when this was all wilderness. Like my grandfather, he settled over here about two miles away, and there wasn't any clear land here. They cleared that a little bit as they went along. My dad was born here about two miles away.

My dad and mother used to talk German when we was kids. In fact, my oldest brother and my oldest sister, when they went to this little school over here, they couldn't talk English. Of course, that bothered them then. Then they really started talking English. But I never could talk German or understand it much.

My dad was a fiddle player too, you know. He bought my first fiddle. I was eleven years old. I hoed corn for a guy for two days, and he gave me an old broken fiddle. And my dad glued it together. It was an old Hopf fiddle, and of course they were cheap. And they used to come apart, you know. They were a fiddle that these gypsies used to run around on the road and sell them. They were a good fiddle, but they were soft. They weren't good for orchestra.

And I just listened to my dad there. Then a few neighbors used to play. Of course, he was about the best around, but I used to kind of watch him and where he put his fingers and so on; or like get the feel of the thing. And then I'd keep practicing. I'd go down the basement, and I wouldn't bother nobody, 'cause they couldn't hear my screeching.

Well, I got this fiddle when I was 11, and I started playing on it. When I was 12, well then I got so I could play pretty good

till I was 18. That's six years. I used to play with my dad. My brother Felix used to play a little bit. He was left-handed though. He never got her quite, but he was pretty good. They used to have a band, and I would stand in for him once in a while. And then I used to play with my dad when he went out for barn dances and house parties and so on.

Usually this was at empty houses. Like a guy would buy a farm; he was going to get married. Okay, sometimes it took three - four years for them before they got married. Well then, they'd have house parties there. He would make a few bucks, and we would make a few dollars.

Well, see at that time I was about 13 - 14 years old, and they never had no amplifiers. A house like this one would have a square dance in one room and one in the other room, and Dad and I would sit in the middle. And then I'd play the banjo for him. I only knew three chords on it, and he could only play in three keys anyway. And I only knew three positions, but we got by. And we played the best we could, and everybody was satisfied, but I think dad got \$3.00, and kept \$2 and gave me \$1. And the people would pay a quarter to get in. That's before the beer come out. Like it was 1933 when they had beer, and this was in the dry days. People would bring a gallon of cider and stuff and a few donuts, and they'd have a little kitchen. But I don't know. It was fun, but you'd hate to go back to those days, I guess, really.

But then I got going with this little girl I got here, and then I was too busy with farming and going out that I just sold my fiddle to my brothers. And I didn't have a fiddle for - I'd say ten years after we was married.

And then my father-in-law had this fiddle I got now. It was made by a fellow he used to work with in Detroit. They used to build street cars, and that guy used to make fiddles on the side. So he'd make them, and then he would play it. And then he would take them apart, and he knew what was wrong with them after he had made them. He knew where they had to be graduated down. So the poor fellow died before he got this one done. And it never sounded right. It was so heavy and just thick in the top, so I took it to this fiddle repair man in Harbor Beach that I knew for years. And he took the top, and he scrubbed her down, and now it sounds pretty good!

Well, I started playing, but I couldn't read notes or nothing. I never took a lesson in my life. And I sent for a book from Sears and Roebuck, and I learned to read out of there. And then I had a buddy in Harbor Beach here that showed me the value of the notes and stuff, see. He showed me how to write music. I never took a lesson from a music teacher. I play everything by ear. What I do is learn the tune from the notes, then I play it by ear. Because, like in a reel or a hornpipe, those notes are so close together and I don't see too well no more - if I was going to follow those, I'd have to play it so slow it wouldn't make any sense. So I learn everything as much as I can by note or from the record, and then I write it down so I don't forget it.

If I get bored with anything or if something bothers me, all I have to do is sit down and play the fiddle. And besides I like to play it anyway. Ma can watch TV here. I says, "I seen those shows six times. Why should I watch 'em?" She hates to set here alone but I said, "If you need me I'll be down cellar." So I go down there, and I'll play tunes. This is what I like to do. ☒☒

Cecil McKenzie

— piano player, fiddler



No one plays the piano quite like Cecil McKenzie. Cecil enjoys just about all kinds of music. She plays all the popular music from the Twenties through the early Fifties. But what she likes best are the old fiddle tunes of the British Isles, which have been handed down through the members of her musical family in Canada and Michigan.

In the following story Cecil describes how she first learned to play the piano by sitting alongside pianists who accompanied silent movies. She would carefully and instantaneously duplicate in a higher register the fingering of the pianist. Cecil plays entirely by ear, and she is admired for her colorful melodic embellishments and lively tempos.

Cecil is a warm and caring person, and music has been an important part of

Michigan Hornpipe

by Eddie Kranz

her life. In recent years she has taken up the fiddle, and she enjoys playing it as well as the organ, accordion and piano. At every opportunity for a little music you will hear Cecil say, "Let's have a tune!" And with her cue the music begins.

Cecil McKenzie:

My dad was English and Irish. My mother was Scotch and Pennsylvania Dutch. And there's music on both sides of the family. I never heard my Grandpa Strong play the fiddle, but I've heard of him. And Uncle Hank played the fiddle, but that was when I was real little, and I didn't know it. And on my dad's side of the family, almost all of them played something. I don't know how many fiddle players there was in the family, and there still is.

When I was 7 years old we had an old organ-one of them old pump organs- you know. Well, my sister, Pearl, played that. She was 12 years older than me at the time. And I wanted to play it; they didn't want me around it, because I made too much noise. So I'd wait until they went outside to hang out clothes or do something, and I would grab that organ. I was just waiting for it, and I learned to play with three fingers. And then when my dad found out about it, anything was okay long as I learned how to chord.

He had me there kinda chording with him, and I think I played the house parties with him when I was about 8 or 9 years old. And you could hear their feet scuffling, you know, and my dad playing the fiddle, and me playing

that old organ. That's what we had at home till I was 12 years old. Then my dad got me a piano.

Every week we'd go to town Saturday night. That's when I played for the silent movies - when I was 11 years old - with Mr. Jennings and his two boys or three boys, whatever it was. You know how they played when the horses would run? They'd play them things, and I'd hit the right notes with them. They played by note, and I played by ear. I had a good ear for it.

When there was house parties, we would go different places. They'd come at 7 o'clock and wouldn't go home until 6 o'clock in the morning. They come about 14 - 15 miles away, some of them. And some of them would be neighbors, but mostly young folks. They would move the furniture back, roll up the rug and square dance. I sat there and played pretty near all night for 'em when I was a kid. And I'd fall asleep and still play it, and somebody would come up and touch me and wake me up. They just square danced and danced the polka, and they danced schottisches. And somebody would step dance a little bit. Maybe somebody'd even sing a song. My dad used to sing little ditties once in a while. There was Irish ditties like "Blackstrap and Gravy," old stuff like that. And then they'd have good eats. And everybody would bring their babies, their little kids, and they'd go to sleep. The bed would be all loaded up with the kids and coats and things.

For a long time it was just a piano and fiddle. Then my brothers - one of 'em had a guitar and one had a banjo - and Harry used to play mouth organ once in a while. That's about it. Used to play "Larry O'Gaff" and "Haste to the Wedding," "The Campbells are Coming" and "Wilson's Clog," "Cock of the North," "Irish Washerwoman," "Turkey in the Straw" - I

don't know if he played "Golden Slippers" or not - "Arkansas Traveler," "Leather Britches" - and I know he played them - "Flowers of Edinburgh," "Soldiers' Joy," "Blackstrap and Gravy" (I don't know if that's the name of it or not), "Tennessee Wagoner" and "Money Musk" and them schottisches.

I never rode a car until I was ten years old. I can remember my dad and I going out to Cedar Valley with horse and cutter. And how I remembered that mostly was the horse's hoofs hitting on the gravel and the sparks flying. I just loved that. And that old robe over me - it was warm. And it was moonlight out. Played till only about 2 o'clock in the morning, you know. Sometimes they'd call up about 3 o'clock in the daytime. We didn't have a phone. They'd call up the neighbors, and then they would come over and ask us, "Would you play to the dance tonight?"

Then one time we played to a wedding for two or three days. I think I was about 12 or 13 then. They had an accordion player, and they had a violin, and they had a piano. And they had gotten drunk, and the fiddle player broke his fiddle. So they come and got my dad and me, and we went and played. It was a German wedding; it would go on for a week. They'd pin a dollar on the bride, or five or ten. They had a basket setting on top of the piano. And then they'd put whatever they wanted in there. And my dad made - that was good money then - \$300.00 for I think two days or something like that. He asked me how much I wanted and I said five dollars. And he said "What?" My dad said, "Is that all you want?" He would give me whatever I asked for, but that was kind of an experience. And I said "five dollars." But you know I sent away and got a pair of shoes and dress with that. Some people had "victrolas" - they called them in them days. You know, you cranked 'em up and they'd get

records. You could get some of them and learn how to play. They used to bring me a record in the morning like "Sierra Sue," or something like that, to learn. And sometimes I'd know it by that night when I'd play. This is how I would learn to play new tunes.

The family would come and we'd have get-togethers. And even up till last year or the year before, if anybody passed away, after the funeral we would have a tune, you know, and have a good time. Well, we didn't stand anybody up in the corner - didn't you hear that one - the song about the Irishman. They got drunk and they took the wake with them wherever they went. They stood him up in the corner and they took him to the beer garden. When they went to bury him, they'd left him some place. I don't know why some people thinks it awful. You feel bad and everything, but then when we'd all get together, you couldn't set around morbid. They'd say, "Let's have a tune." So we'd start having tunes, and everybody would enjoy theirselves.

I always had a good time; always liked music. We didn't have other entertainment, and I think that made the difference. ☐ ☐

Ralph McKenzie

— caller



Ralph McKenzie is a quiet man who spends much of his time working in the garden, doing all kinds of carpentry, and conducting a lucrative saw-sharpening business. He is married to piano-playing Cecil, and he beams a proud smile whenever she entertains at the keyboard. Ralph is the kind of man who takes delight in seeing others achieve, while he plays down his own accomplishments.

Ralph learned to call square dances as a young man by listening carefully to

other callers. As is typical with so many other tradition-bearers, there was a long period of time in which Ralph did not call dances. Work in the factory, family obligations, and other priorities intervened. Only recently did Ralph resume his old interest, and our Thumb Area square dances are all the better for it.

Ralph McKenzie:

When I got big enough to go - and not against the wishes of my folks - I started going to square dances and house parties. They figured I was going, that most kids did anyway, I guess. They'd see what would happen. They figured maybe that, hoping that they brought me up good enough, so I wouldn't go astray - too far astray. My dad was superintendent of Sunday School for 20 - 30 years, and my mother was always a Sunday School teacher. So we never did have dances in the house. My dad's uncle was a musician, and my mother played the piano quite well, all note, and specialized more in hymns and stuff. She never played any of the square dance tunes to my knowledge.

I was probably 18 or 20 or so and I'd gone with girls, but five or six of us guys would get in a car, and fill the car up, and go someplace to a dance. Since the country was inhabited and they had a house, I think they've had house parties. In the country they used to have those house parties somewhere pretty near every week. Well I was at the age where I enjoyed going to them. A lot

of it was square dancing, which kind of intrigued me to a certain extent. And they had one especially good caller up here, and they had one down in Port Huron.

Same music that come down through the last century or two anyway, or maybe more. Maybe a fiddle or guitar, and maybe a piano. Maybe a fiddle and a piano. Maybe just a man with a fiddle sitting in a chair at a house party. My uncle George Betts used to play fiddle, and I've seen him at house parties. They'd take up a collection, and he might get \$5.00. Sit there all night playing. He came from Canada too. Knew all the Canadian tunes, which fiddlers we got here do, but he could play them all. He was a little bit portly. He could sit back in that easy chair with sandy hair, sandy mustache. Play away all night, stop for a little break once in a while and a drink of coffee or something. Lived all alone - Lakeport. My uncle used to walk from Lakeport with his fiddle on his back, and play for me when I was a youngster.

Well, there was good house parties. I guess there were bad ones, too. You see a little more of the bad at the dance hall than you did the good. They used to have hall dances here, Gardendale, up at Blaine and Crosswell, Lexington - always Lexington, and there was two or three locations at Port Huron they had them. And I used to cover them all. Used to go to Riley Center sometimes, Capac maybe. I covered them pretty well. Saturday nights I usually went to a hall square dance.

Every town had what they used for a dance hall. Might have been a Gleaner Hall, might have been some store - had a hall over the top of it that they would rent somebody. Somebody would start a dance going someplace, and they'd

get an orchestra and try and make a little on their square dance activity. And advertise it a little bit and get a crowd. And if the callers were good and the music was good, they'd get crowds.

Davis up at Blaine was probably the best caller I'd ever heard. He was simply good. I liked Bennie Davis so well really that I used to dance to a lot of squares, and I'd kinda go along and learn different calls, so I could do it. I danced so many of them. I'd kind of say it along when the caller was calling them. And same ones crop up ever' week or so. You know it pretty soon. It's repetition, I guess. After a half a dozen times you sorta knew the call. And then maybe when I go away from there I'd repeat it to myself a little bit so I'd know it. And then sometimes in their own local community they have a party, and they want a square dance, I'd call a few.

Been 50 years ago, 55 - 57 years ago. I probably knew seven or eight calls. About all I could do. A couple of sets I could get by with, and maybe someone want same one over, you know. Happened once in a while. "Cross Over," I used to do that and "Grapevine Twist," usually had that one, and I had done the "Waltz Quadrille" a few times. "Nellie Gray"-that was a little different too. And:

Right and left over.
Right and left back.
Balance the Floor.
Both over and back.
And chain your ladies,
And chain them back.
And half promenade.
And half sashay.

Well, that was a regular paddy hoedown dance,

actually. They could do it to "Turkey in the Straw," or they could do it to most anything, I guess. I never hear that any more. I don't think people want it any more or something, or been done more. But that's one everybody knew.

Back then, before radio and TV, growing children and people had to manufacture their own entertainment. They didn't have it all bottled up for them. And they were pretty good times, as far as I knew. ☐☐

Chip Walker

— fiddler



A hush comes over the crowd whenever Chip Walker is on stage. The audience wants to savor every moment as he double-stops the harmonies to "Faded Love" or some other good fiddle tune. Chip is a Michigan boy, but he has always admired the fiddlers of the South, and has patterned his style after them.

Chip comes from a musical family, his mother being an opera house pianist. Chip has performed professionally with some of the big names in Country Music. Perhaps one of his most exciting jobs was when he fiddled for the Fisher Strike Orchestra during the famous 1937 Sit-Down Strike in Flint. He entertained some of Organized Labor's greatest heroes while dodging missiles thrown by theatre-goers who were not sym-

pathetic to the cause.

In his story, Chip mentions that at one time his father prohibited the playing of the fiddle for religious reasons. The association of the fiddle with the devil was a common notion among many people. While Chip's keen sense of humor may prompt some to think that he has a little of the devil in him, he is a friend to all and no finer person is to be found.

Chip Walker:

I started out to play classic music. That's what I wanted. I did have the ability, but not anymore. But, oh, I been with my mother night after night after night and those great long operas, you know. You see, she played in opera houses during World War I. She would take me on a hand sleigh to the opera house and go in the back door stage entrance. And, of course, it was nice and warm in there. Put me on a stool there, or on a coat on the floor to lay down. I was just a little guy, and this would have been 1914-15, see, and I was born in '12, so you know how old I'd be.

And I remember one instance - why I don't remember more, I don't know - but my mother was on one of those elevating stages. And a great big old grand piano; she's playing it, see. What happened - the stage slowly disappeared. And before that, the actors and actresses had put me on a little three-legged stool right there where the curtains come by. They let me peek out at my mother, and when she disappeared I started to cry. And they grabbed me right away quick, and they stuffed my mouth with marshmallows.

My mother being a musician, she had this violin that was given to her by her uncle. And so her and my father decided to give me lessons. And I had to ride a horse nine miles to town, summer and winter, spring and fall, with this violin wrapped in protective covering hanging on the saddle. And I took my music lessons for two years from a Congregational preacher. Well, then my brother was killed and that stopped. My father was very religious - and mother. But the violin, in his opinion at that time, was an instrument of the devil. So we didn't play it.

My brother was killed in 1925, I think it was. And so then I finished high school, and we moved to Flint. I got about 16 years old - running around with these kids - played guitar, ukeleles, mouth organ, horns. So I dragged the fiddle out and started scratchin' on that. And little by little, one piece after the other, started learning, see. I played at little house dances - just young folks.

1937 come along and a big Fisher Body strike - a General Motors strike - and I was the fiddle player with the Fisher Strike Orchestra. And if you ever see any pictures of the Fisher Strike, 1937, you'll see me, with the violin, in high top shoes. And I was in there for 43 days. I knew Walter, Roy, and Victor Reuther, and all them boys - Bob Travis and Old Man Lewis. I played before those guys in the IMA Auditorium. You know how many guys were in there? I think by memory it was about 13,000 people could get in there! Played before that crowd many times.

I remember one exciting moment when we were on stage at the Rialto Theater in Flint.

And we had a guitar player that thought he was a composer, and what he was, was a transposer. And he took this song of "The Old Sour Apple Tree," and he put words to it: "We'll Hang the Flint Police on the Sour Apple Tree." And the curtain dropped in front of us to save us, 'cause stuff was starting to come down the aisle - eggs, tomatoes and all that sort of stuff. But from then on, little by little, you might say "steady by jerks," I kept picking up pieces. And then years later I put a band together, young guys in 1947-48, and we played on WTAC in Flint.

I've always been interested in WSM [WSM is the Nashville radio station which airs "The Grand Ole Opry"]. I always wanted to go down there. I always wanted to be coached and tutored down there to fiddle like they want it. And I don't know if you recognize it, but my fiddle style is pretty well Southern. And I'll just tell you something else. There was an old Southern guy over last Saturday; got his arm around me and hummed a tune. He was so shaky I couldn't tell what it was. And he said, "Well, I'll get my fiddle, and I'll fiddle it for you." He went and got his fiddle. He said, "Chip," he says, "It's a good square dance tune." He said, "I know you are from the South and it should be easy for you." I never let the man down by telling him I wasn't born down there, and it is nice to hear someone say that because of my music, the quality of my tone, telling that's where I came from - down there, see.

I and my oldest could step dance. And I played to the Beaver Lake Hunting Club, a big wealthy man's club. And the manager - he knew my family and children



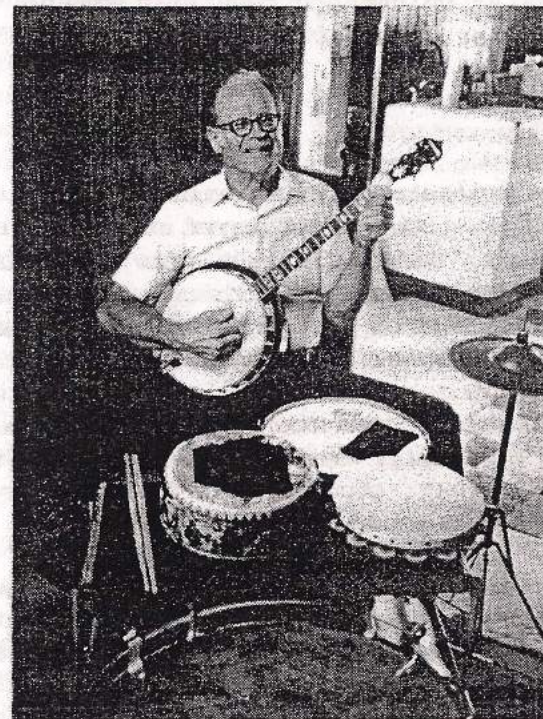
Chip Walker fiddling with the Fisher Strike Orchestra in Flint, Michigan, 1937. Photo from The Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

and myself. And I'm playing there. I'd hired out with three men and myself, and they wasn't satisfied with us. The old man sure got my daughter - "Come on Lucille, get up here." Put her on stage. "Come on, Walker. Fiddle some music for her." So I fiddled like I always did for her, and she tap danced. She was a graceful thing. What it was - just a clog. But she was good at it. You could hear it, see. And my wife always dressed her in sailor clothes.

And a lot of wealthy people, lawyers, doctors and so forth, Lansing, Detroit, Grand Rapids, they belonged to that club. And when I got through, they, in order to throw a five dollar bill or a ten dollar bill up there, had to put money in it. So 50¢ - wrap it around there and throw it up on stage, see. She got seventy some dollars then, just her tappin' and steppin' about three or four minutes. And I got \$40 for the dance, and she still laughs about it! ☐☐

Harley Scott

— player of many instruments



Harley Scott is a versatile musician. He plays the violin, banjo, guitar, drums, piano, accordion, and saxophone. While Harley has developed his musical abilities far beyond those of what we might term a "traditional" musician, he still plays and enjoys the old tunes, which he learned as a child at the house parties.

Harley's occupations have been as varied as his music. He taught in a one-room country school and a junior high

school, worked on a farm, and still carries mail today.

Like many of the other musicians, Harley shares his music with less fortunate folks. He volunteers regularly as an entertainer at his community's medical center.

Harley Scott:

My mother could play mouth organ a little bit. She never played out, but she could play "Turkey in the Straw" and "Irish Washerwoman," and a few things. I know she got a kick out of it, but that never seemed to grasp me much. I remember when I was quite young she did that, but as I got older, she didn't seem to play it so much anymore. The family demanded more of her time. But she always stuck to the piano pretty well. She always enjoyed playing that.

I was learning piano and violin, because I was just getting old enough that we was going to these house parties, see, and that's where it [*my talent*] really developed, you know. And some of these square dance tunes and ballads and folk songs - see, they played them - and two-steps. Years ago they had the two-step and the waltz. When you go to one of these house parties there'd be a square dance and a two-step and a waltz. And then they'd have a schottische and a "Rye Waltz."

I went to these house parties and I was just old enough to remember a lot of things. I was about ten years old. I know I used to wear my mother out, because I was too timid to ask some other lady, and I'd always dance with my mother. My dad'd probably be over in the corner with some of the other guys play-

ing cards and something, so it worked out all right.

And then the ladies would bring potluck or something - cake or cookies or pies. And they'd always have coffee or tea, though tea was quite a common thing those days, more than coffee. Then today, of course, coffee is the thing. And 'course, as far as refreshments, sometimes there'd be some men who would like their drink, you know, like whiskey or something. But it wasn't nothing like today. I mean like they have their booze parties. It wasn't anything like that. It was just some of the guys would like a drink once in a while. They'd go all night long with one drink. It was really for a good time, and the majority of them wouldn't drink.

They'd probably start dancing at 8:30 - 9:00. And then about 11:30 they'd have the lunch and talk around a little bit. And then they'd dance till sometimes two - three o'clock in the morning. The family would all go, unless the children were big enough at home they could chaperone the rest of the family. Well, I remember a good many times I was asleep on the bed, and the folks would come in and get me ready to go home, you know. And everybody would put their clothes on the bed. The ladies, of course, put their coats on the bed, and they'd have really a bunch of coats on there. I remember that, and the kids would just be sleeping in their clothes in the bed. Oh, I can remember that real plain.

When I was about ten, I'd get out there and jump around. And, see, I used to play a lot of house parties up north of here. There's

Polish and German more north of here. You go about 8 - 10 miles north of here, and there used to be a lot of parties up there after I got older to play. And I always enjoyed going up there, because the whole family would go. Boy, the kids would get on the stage, and you'd be playing. Whatever you'd be playing, there would be ten kids around you. You know, all the way from about three years old that could hardly walk and to fifteen - sixteen up watching you. It was new, you know; they was curious.

Well, see, they had horses and buggies in those days. And the radius wouldn't be very big, you see. Maybe a radius of five to seven miles around here. If the work was caught up and they weren't rushed, they'd have a house party in the summertime and in the fall, but mostly in the winter. And they'd have their buggies till they got snow on the ground, and then they'd have their cutters. I remember dancing in here lots of times. Then my cousin lives up here just a half-mile. They had a bigger house, and they danced in two rooms. They had a big arch in the middle, and they could have two sets going.

But that's the only form of entertainment we had, see. No telephone, no radios and it's very seldom they'd have a phonograph. People didn't have those old-type phonographs. We never did have one of those, but a matter of fact, we had the first telephone north of Sandusky though.

I've played a few barn dances, but that was later. Last one I played was about ten years ago. See, I didn't play too many of that. They never stressed too many barn dances. It was in the winter time, and barns 'course, would be cold. A lot of farmers had machine sheds up the road, like I say, about

twenty years ago. Most of the time a fella'd have a new machine shed put up, why they'd have a dance in there before it got too cold. And they'd put corn meal on the cement, and danced, and have a big time. And they'd have the same type of music, little bit of everything. I played a lot.

But as homes were getting better, and telephones, and well just more modern - they were getting nicer homes as time went on - and I think that had a little bit something to do with going to a hall. They'd have a hall dance. And the family was starting to get involved in other activities. The young people and the boyfriends, they'd go down to the hall, and preferable than going to a house party.

As the rock and roll started coming in, see, the young people couldn't foxtrot, even my two children. When they get to college and, see, they went on this other type of music, and they forgot. And then you know yourself, you go to a rock and roll, and you don't have to know them too much, and you can get up and dance. To be a nice foxtrotter and a waltzer, it takes more than just getting up and doing it right now. It takes a little time to develop that, and I think that's why rock and roll went along so good. ☐☐

Eldon Field

— caller



Eldon Field is generally a quiet man, except when he calls a square dance. Then his eyes flash, his voice is bold, and he sees to it that all the dancers have the time of their lives.

Eldon comes from a family of musicians, but he prefers dancing to being on stage. He would rather dance than call. In fact, as he explains in his story, it was a combination of circumstances and his own sense of pride that forced him into calling his first dance.

Eldon describes the house parties and hall dances of his past. He mentions some of the roughness that occasionally took place outside the dance hall. He also recalls that period in his life when work was too hard and long, and money too scarce, for dancing to occupy much of his time.

Eldon Field:

My mother's family was musicians. All by ear. My mother played the piano. And I remember one song that she'd play and sing, "Shall We Gather at the River." I don't know whether they was really church-goers or not, but they sure fought against drinking and swearing. And the whole family - my uncle, my granddad and his dad before him - used to play a fiddle at dances around the country, house parties mostly.

I heard my cousin (she was a couple of years older than me, and they lived not too far from us) tell about my uncle [who] would load her on a sleigh, and wrap her all up. And she'd hang on to the fiddle. And he'd pull her down the creek on the ice. And it seems like where they were going was not very far from the creek - probably a couple or three miles down the creek. He'd pull her on this sled down this creek on the ice, and she'd play the piano for him, and he'd play the fiddle.

Well, I've heard my uncle play fiddle so much! When I first went to Detroit, I stayed with him, lived with him, board and roomed with him. And there wasn't very many nights went by that he didn't get the fiddle or the banjo out, especially if somebody'd come around that could play one or the other, or chord the piano, and saw away on them tunes.

When I first met my wife, we went mostly to house parties. First one was by Caro. And we went back down to Marshall to around her folks' there, and we went to several dances then. We did before we were married down there, and we did after.

Most of them was on Saturday night. Just an ordinary house. They move the furniture out. I don't know where they put it. Out maybe in the bedrooms, or clogged up some other room; I don't know. There was at least two rooms which had anywhere as many as four sets in a house. They'd roll up the rug; get it out of the way. But now when you nail carpets down, you can't do that. There was one house that was kind of a long house. Was all bedrooms on one side, and it was a kitchen, dining room and living room on the other side. And it seems like there was one of the bedrooms they cleared it out, so they could dance in that one and each of the other two rooms.

Down in Marshall there was no drinking. And I had just as much fun, and maybe more, with no drinking. Now around Deford, they was doing a little more drinking when I first went there. I didn't know there was any drinking.

It might have been, but I didn't know it, and for a long time it was the same.

Well then, there was a couple of guys that didn't dance. And one would pick a quarrel with somebody, and the other one would egg him on. And they would get in a fight out in the street. Well, it'd get so that was nearly an every Saturday night occurrence, and the sheriff put a padlock on the door. Wouldn't be any dances for a while. Well, I don't know that there was any drinking in that. If there was, it was very little. But I remember one time this guy picked a fight with a sailor boy. He was home on furlough, and the fight didn't last very long. That sailor boy went up and down the guy's ribs like a tattoo. He wasn't a fighter, but it seems like he'd always pick on somebody that wasn't a fighter either. Now about that time, that's when I went to Detroit, so I didn't get into much of that. I can't be satisfied unless I'm making people laugh, and the more they laugh, the better I like it.

But I really never went into the business of calling, because I like to dance too well. Actually what made me do the very first one I ever done, my girlfriend (not my wife - before that) and I went to a house dance, house party. And it seems like when we got there we had no caller, and this girlfriend - she called a square dance. And she didn't do a bad job of it either. And you know,

she was under twenty, maybe 18 - 19.
So I says I ain't going to let her beat
me out. So at the same dance, I called
one. One or two or something like that,
and off and on I have called some ever
since.

The head two ladies cross over
And by your opposite stand.
The side two ladies cross over
And all join hands.
It's honors on the corner.
Honor your partners all.
Take the corner lady
And promenade the hall.
If I had a gal and she wouldn't dance,
I tell you what I would do.
I'd buy her a boat and send her afloat
And she'd paddle her own canoe.

There was quite a spell there when
I was raising a family, my income was
all put to work. And there was a
couple of years, about three years I
guess, that we rented a farm, or might
as well say I worked for the farmer.
Anyway, the provision was he furnished
everything and I got a third. And that
was pretty skimpy. And then another
time, I come back up to Deford, and my
dad give me a cow and a team of horses
and a harness. And he would back my
note for another cow. Well, two cows
don't give you very much of an income
anytime. We just couldn't afford to
go to dances. ☐☐

Skip Loxton

— guitar player



By listening to some scratchy old records of his father's fine fiddling, it is easy to see how Skip came by his love of old-time music. Skip plays a good rhythm and lead guitar. With a little coaxing, he also sings some of the most sensitive interpretations of many Country-Western classics.

Skip is a welder by trade. He comes from a family of welders. He believes in putting long hard hours into his work, and into doing good for others. Skip is always volunteering his services, musical

and otherwise, to help folks in any worthy cause.

Skip says he has always been a shy person, but recently he seems to have overcome his bashfulness. At a good number of the Thumb Area musical festivities, Skip Loxton is the master of ceremonies. His warm and friendly personality makes everyone - performers and audience alike - feel right at home.

Skip Loxton:

There was 26 musicians at one time that used to come to the house. My dad was ill and couldn't work, and they knew that his happiness was the fiddle. Now these fellows, Pee Wee Chrysler and Everett Babbs, at one time lived across the street and down the road from us, out in a little section of town they called the Campau. Maybe you've heard of it. It was a German-Polish settlement at one time, I guess, and that's where we ended up. And I can remember when the house parties was there.

Particularly on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon we could have anywhere from 10 to 50 people. And a big portion of them would be musicians. The neighbors would all take their lawn chairs and set out along the ditch as long as the music was being carried by the wind. Like I say, at times in our little house, which was two rooms downstairs and two rooms and a sewing room upstairs, and what they called the Michigan basement, we had 85 people in at different times. Started anywhere from noon, and very seldom would it ever end before

three-four o'clock in the morning. They weren't believers in hitting the hay early. It was just a spur of the moment thing, and you just get together, and they turn into a party - is about the size of it.

Most of the houses that we went to weren't big enough to even have one square dance set in the thing. The biggest house was my grandmother's, and she had a large-size dining room and living room that had a big archway in between. And they didn't do all that much dancing even in her house. The card parties, or the card playing, was the thing that went along with the music. Somebody would come along, set down, start shooting the breeze and, "Let's have a card game." Euchre back then was the big thing, so they'd set down, and the first thing you know, they'd have four hands. Then somebody would say, "Well, we got to have lunch." They definitely had to - the beer and stuff going around there, so you gotta have lunch. You can't go without eating all day. So then they'd get out the old bologna, or something like that, you know, just have a nice lunch. And then one thing would lead to another and, "Well, we gotta have a tune." I think back then it would be a drop-in thing, and somebody would get on the phone and say, "Hey, what are you doing?" And they'd come over.

I must have been about 10, and I started playing a four-string banjo, tuned guitar-style. I played the D, G and A chords, and I used to sit and strum that. I don't remember whether I sold it, or whether somebody else sold it, and got the guitar. But at that time, they used to sell salve, and they'd give you a "Gene Autry" copy - a little old hollow-body guitar, and I got one.

Evidently, I must have sold salve, or I sent away and I was supposed to sell it, and everybody else sold it for me.

My dad decided that he needed a vacation away from things, and thought the North Woods would be good for his health. They got me out of school, and my mother and dad and I took off in my brother Johnny's old Chevrolet car. My mother's aunt and uncle was the ones we went up to see, because of the fact they had the big old farmhouse, and a place for us to stay. We stayed for about ten days. Didn't hardly have anything to eat or anything. We had pancakes for breakfast, pancakes for dinner, and pancakes for supper.

They used to go into town every now and again, and word got out that my dad played fiddle. So they had a house party. That's when I just knew enough to be able to tune the guitar. I knew about three chords at that time, well, the same chords that I knew on the banjo. Only thing is, with a guitar I could at least play the six-string G chord. Yeah, I almost forgot about that. So that was really probably my big house party debut or whatever.

That was back before they had electric lights strung back down through the dirt roads. I got a picture in my mind right now. They had a kerosene lantern setting right on top of the piano. My dad played the fiddle and I on the guitar. And I remember that they had hardly no furniture in the house. It was an old hardwood floor. They danced in this great big living room of this old farm house. They didn't have no meal or anything there. That started before dark and ended at daylight. I remember them talking about people left there and went home and milked the cows. ☐☐

Lois Bettsworth

— fiddler



Lois is shown here with her fiddle student, Steve Williams.

Lois Bettsworth has inherited strong musical traditions from her family, which were transplanted here from the South. She has combined this legacy with years of formal training. Lois is a competent violinist, but her love of the old-time tunes and her sensitivity to her music make her a spirited fiddler as well.

Lois was one of the early organizers of the Original Michigan Fiddlers' Association, and she leads a popular dance band, "The Shades of Blue," which entertains several

times each week at nursing homes, senior centers, medical centers, and other places where confined audiences may be found. Her commitment to helping others is typical of many of our Thumb Area musicians.

Lois Bettsworth:

Dad played the fiddle. He started when he was about 24. His dad played fiddle, and a cousin named Elsie over in Metz, Missouri, where Dad grew up. Elsie played that waltz we named after her, so fast that you could polka to it. She was the only woman fiddle player I knew of, until I got into the Original Michigan Fiddlers' Association. Dad's mother died when she started to get up the tenth day after having a daughter, and Dad was just 12 years old. He told of his dad sitting by his mother's bed playing [the fiddle] and crying. I could hardly get Dad to play the waltz [which the grandfather played], so that I could learn it.

Guess I know how he felt. When he died in June, I couldn't make myself pick up the fiddle. Get a lump in my throat thinking about it now. One night I got the fiddle out and played the "Tuesday Night Waltz" over and over again, crying the whole time. That was our favorite to play together, Dad and me. He had kind of given up the fiddle as he got older, and felt that I played better than he did from having lessons. But we would coax him down to Dorothy's, and she would play piano. Jean would play banjo. Dorothy and Jean are my two sisters. There would be lots of beer, and we'd have a real family party. We could get him to play about once a month like that.

My father was English and Scotch, and came to Flint, Michigan, in 1926 from Nevada, Mis-

souri, after he had "bought" a job in the Chevrolet factory here. My mother was expecting my sister Dorothy, and they had no money, so one cold night the police in one town let them sleep in the jail to keep warm before heading out again for Flint. My mother was Irish, Swiss and Welsh, and came from Litchfield, Minnesota. Dad had been a hired hand on her dad's farm in Minnesota, and that's how they met. After coming to Flint, they lived in several places, all around the west side of Flint, until moving to Flushing in 1942.

When Dad played for house parties, they'd take us kids along. And when we got tired, we'd get put on the bed with all the coats, to go to sleep. Boy, what a miserable feeling to get woke up, just when you're in a deep sleep, to be taken home. We'd go to sleep hearing all the music and dancing going on. I didn't do any playing at them. It was just when I was quite young. When the beer parties came in, they seemed to stop having the parties. Sometimes we went to Youngblood's house to parties. Mable Youngblood played piano and her husband played guitar. Their kids were just about the same age as us, so we'd have a good time tearing around while they made music.

Before I was nine years old, used to sneak Dad's fiddle out and play it. Thought I put it back just the way he had it, but somehow he knew, and I used to get a licking with his razor strap. Must have kept it up, because for Christmas Santa brought a little tin fiddle for me. Monkeyed around with that, and when they heard me play "Five Foot Two," they decided I was to have music lessons. Started at Honolulu Conservatory in Flint. Started fiddle lessons and got my first glasses both when I was nine years old. Then I would get a licking with the razor strap if I

didn't practice. Dorothy and Jean would make fun of me, about how squeaky it sounded, as they ran out to play. And I had to stand there for an hour or two practicing - that's why I don't like to play alone now. Have already done enough of that.

Took lessons for ten years starting with the Honolulu Conservatory and with some other teachers in between. Did continue my violin lessons with Romeo Tata, at the college in East Lansing, for one more year, till he said, "Why don't you get married and settle down?" Guess I didn't show enough interest in working in the classical music field.

I learned the fiddle tunes from Dad and the other guys that used to come to the house to play all the time. If they weren't coming there, we were going to their place. One guitar player by the name of Graydon Choate was very kind in playing guitar along with me. When I got to know a few tunes, I used to go to his house, and we'd sit in the kitchen and play some tunes. Gave me a lot of encouragement.

One time Dad and a couple of other guys who played guitar were going out to New Lothrop to play a dance. They've played for a sack of beans or a quarter lots of times. And they didn't see the end of the road where Mt. Morris Road jogs at M-13. They zoomed right straight ahead. The car fell in that great big drainage ditch, and broke all their instruments. They hitched a ride back to town, borrowed some instruments, and went back out and played the dance. The job must go on!

That must have been when Dad bought the fiddle from Sears Roebuck Company. He wasn't happy with the sound of it, and had a man who lived on Second Street in Flint do what he always called "graduating" it. Of course, that was done after I stepped on it. He used to let

me take his fiddle to school to play in the school orchestra, but I had to bring it home each night. I was riding on our bicycle at the back of Zimmerman School, and there was some cinders or gravel on the sidewalk. And the bike slipped, and I fell down and stepped right on the middle of the fiddle. Hell to pay, I'll tell you! But after it was fixed up, he still let me take it to school, and I played that one until Romeo Tata recommended that I buy a violin.

One boyfriend of mine took me out to Parkers' Barn Dance to play, which I did. But I was more interested in him than in fiddling at the time, so didn't keep it up. After I got married and had the girls, the fiddle just stayed in the case till Ernie Gilbert, who delivered baked goods for the Flushing Bakery, heard that I played. He needed a fiddle player for his band, so tried it out, and it worked. So we played at wedding receptions, the Masonic Hall in Flushing, Flushing Fair on the back of a truck one time in the parade, talent shows down there, the Dawn Patrol air show or breakfast - whatever they call it - till finally Kinney's Auditorium needed a new band for the summer. And we started playing there. Then it was Western square dance clubs and the old-time square dances that I played for about 15 years. Got really tired of it, so quit for a while. Then when I retired, started playing with the Genesee County Senior Citizen Orchestra, but I couldn't do any hoedowns. So when Paul Wightman - piano - and Jim Waite - guitar - crossed my path, it sounded pretty good. And the "Shades of Blue" were formed about four years ago.

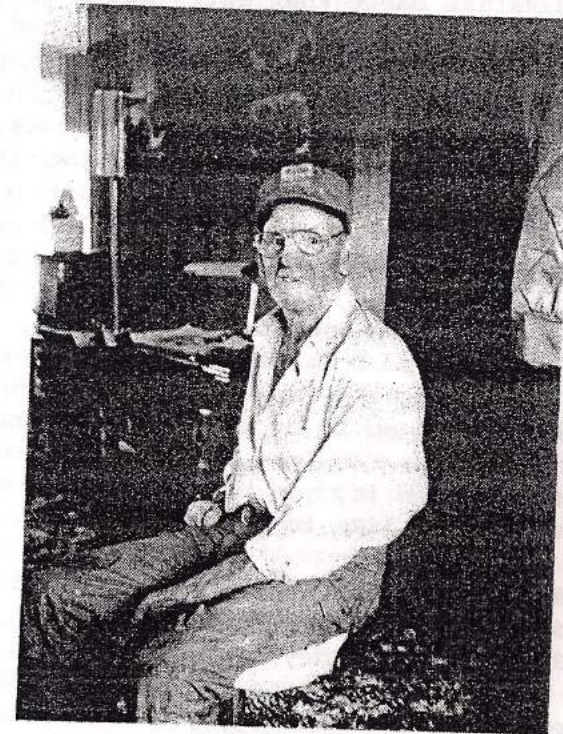
A musician can get such a lift from playing for someone. To bring some joy to others, such as in nursing homes and senior centers. Read an article recently, and the volunteer said in reply to why he gave all the produce

from his garden away, "I'd rather have a friend than a dollar." Really like that. Even though there might not be many at a nursing home or party, and whoever is giving the event apologizes, I tell them that we figure a few people need the diversion of entertainment just as much as a big crowd. Some musicians want to get paid for playing, but I feel that we can make our contribution to the people who can't afford to pay, and I honestly enjoy playing more for someone who likes it, and tells me so, than for someone that pays money but doesn't enjoy the music, or at least doesn't indicate that they do. I'll play the freebies anytime over the other.

Sometimes when we are on our way to play somewhere, and I've had a really tiring day of work, I wonder how on earth I ever got into such a mess. How can I even lift my arms to do anything, or get feeling cheerful enough to put on a program, much less even a good program. But once we get started, all at once you're having such a good time, that you don't even feel tired or feel blue or down. It just makes you forget problems and tiredness, and leaves you just feeling good. As Mom used to say, "It does your heart good." ☒☒

Al Turner

— caller, step dancer



The crowd claps in time to the music as the fiddler lets loose on an old hoedown, and Al Turner bursts into his own special step dance. Step dancing, or clogging, is traditionally a spontaneous solo performance. Those who are known to step dance are often requested to do so at least once during an evening's entertainment, but rarely do these local celebrities wait for an invitation. If the tune is right, their feet start moving.

Al Turner worked for a while in a Flint automotive factory. But most of his life has

been spent on the farm. Al is no stranger to hard work, but it may well be his dancing that has kept the sparkle in his eye.

Al Turner:

I'd rather dance than eat. That's for sure! I don't think we ever went to a dance, and this is from the time I was a kid till now, that they didn't get me up there to step dance. When I was little, I didn't really like to. Now, heck, I walk right up there. But then, you know, they had to push me out there.

The best tune I like for stepping - clogging-though, is that darn "Chinese Breakdown." That has just got a nice beat there, you know, and it's not too fast. I really like that. I like to get up there and step dance to that there. But it's so easy for me to do it. It's just as easy as walking across the room, to get up there and keep in tune with it, you know. 'Course the people, they really like to watch that.

Well now, I learned that from an old feller used to do it over here. Only he always done the Irish Jig. And when they do the Irish Jig, they're always backing up, because they gotta back up as they're doing the Irish Jig, you know. And then they come forward, but you gotta have a good space to do that. And I used to do that all the time. You've seen these Irish cloggers on TV, especially out of Canada. Boy, they got some good ones up there. I used to do it just like that. But then they'd get me up in a small place where I couldn't back up, so then I just learned it a little bit different. And I been doing that since I was knee high to a grasshopper. 'Course I used to act up. I used to twist my legs up like they was twisted up like a rope. But I don't do that no more. Might not be able to get them untwisted. But I used to get up there, and just cut up, and have a ball there.

I had a brother and two sisters that used to do it all the time. And my older brothers they was buggers to get into mischief. My dad always chewed that "Yankee Girl" plug tobacco. My mother'd get it for him by a dozen plugs at a time, 'cause they only went to town on weekends. And they'd [my brothers] shave off a little shavin' off the side of every plug, and put it in their handkerchief in their pocket. And my dad, 'course he claimed he never knew it, but I think he knew it long before he let on he did. We were step dancin' one night right in this little old house, right over here, and his handkerchief fell out of his pocket with these chunks of plug tobacco in it. And boy, I'm telling you, he really got his behind paddled by my mother.

I like to call. I like to call them old hoedowns though. I get a kick out of calling them, because they're fast, and they got to be on the move all the time. And it's something different. Just learned them from listening to the old guys around here that used to call. 'Cause a lot of old fellers used to call at these house dances, you know. 'Cause they just picked it up, see. In fact, probably within a six-mile radius here, there was at least a dozen old-timers that used to call.

Bill Cogwell - we've talked about him for years gone by. He'd always have a big chew of tobacco in his mouth, and the juice'd run down. And he had a beard, you know, and he'd go like that there. He'd keep right on a 'callin'. He called this one tune that we can always remember. I can't remember it all now, but it's:

First couple leads up to the right
And right sashay and take a bow.
Sashay back, and you know how.

And when he'd yell that out, you know, he'd lose his [false] teeth. Wasn't comical to him, you

know. For us, when we was little, we'd stand a-long to the side, you know, just to wait for his teeth to come out. That was comical as the...!

Then there was another old feller just lived down this road about a mile and a half. And his name was Leo Swash, but we always called him King Swash, 'cause he could call. And he'd call all night long. And call them old tunes, and never call the same one.

All these callers, they were just farmers around the area. My dad called square dances when he was really an old man yet. 'Cause he was an old man when I was big enough to really know him. Because time I got to be 6 or 7 years old, he was already 67 years old. Then there was an old feller lived right here over on the corner, and he'd always call square dances. And of course, I just picked it up. I'd just stand there, you know, and I'd call them to myself out loud. But nobody else could hear it while the other guy was calling. And 'course, they were all these old calls, you know, like the first change that we always called at a square dance was:

Head couple balance the floor
And balance it back.
Then change your ladies
And change them back.

That was always the first change. And then they had the regular hoedowns like "Lady Round the Lady and Gent Round the Gent" or "Behind the Couple and Take a Peek and Back in the Center and Shake Your Feet." And 'course, I learned all them a long time ago.

But these singing calls they only come into the picture, oh, maybe the last 15 years. And now there's about 400 of them singing calls. There's pretty near a call for every tune that you can pick out of a fiddle. I never heard a singing call except for "Red River Valley." But most of them

would just call where they could play any tune to it, see.

That "Grapevine Twist" is a real good dance. But on a floor a lot of people go crazy with it, you know. And when they make that "whoa-haw-gee" in the middle, and they go to beat the heck and jerk them - and they got six couples hanging on there - that back girl, boy, she's got to hang on. And then if it's a slippery floor, she may get hurt. They quit dancing that for quite a few years, because, you know, older women was getting hurt because they'd get jerked through there. I seen a girl fall one night, and she couldn't get up. She had to be carried out.

Very seldom ever missed a Saturday night having a dance. Right in houses within probably a five-mile area here. Because we used to go with the horses, horses and wagon - wintertime, horses and sleighs. I was just a little kid then. They'd always have hard cider in the basement and that's the only drinking they done. They didn't have this beer and stuff at these houses like that, because a lot of the people were real fine people, and they didn't believe in it. But this hard cider, that's just something that was natural for the old-timers years ago, in this area 'specially. And we used to go to this little house here, and then we used to go down to a big house just about a mile and a half down this road. Then they'd go west to another one, and they'd have one every Saturday.

They always got started at nine o'clock. Sometimes earlier than that, but that's when they figured everybody had their chores done, you know. And they got there with the horses, and every place had a barn fixed, so they could tie their horses up in the barn, so they didn't have to stand out in the cold, you know. And then later on, it come the old Model T, then the Model A. My dad never did drive a car. But he bought a Model T in 1917, I think. But my older brothers was already old enough to drive, so they'd drive.

Boy, they didn't catch me out of the house when there was square dancing, 'cause I was square dancing. And then there's a lady just lives north of town up here. If she was here, she'd tell you I was square dancing with her when I couldn't get my hand any further up than her wrist, you know. I'm up there just hanging on to her wrist, because I was so small.

This one guy he plays the concertina, and he'd always have a cigarette in his mouth. But you never see any smoke, and the ashes would get out there about that long on his cigarette. And they'd fall on his concertina. He'd just go like that there and they'd shake off on the floor. Keep right on playing. He played until four o'clock that night.

They never thought about home. The people, 'course, they never had far to go. They were all living in this area, and 'course some of them had cars. But most of them had horses when we first started. But, heck, if it was daylight, that didn't matter. They'd go home and milk their cows, and go to church, if they went to church. 'Course, the church never was far away, see. We only lived four miles from the church up here, and three miles from the Catholic church over there. ☐☐

V. J. Donaghy

— caller



Four generations of the Donaghy family have lived on the old homestead, and V.J. Donaghy has cultivated a deep respect for tradition. V.J. is an active member of his community, taking part in all types of civic functions, and he is very involved in local politics. He loves horses, and it is probably a toss-up as to whether he would rather ride horseback or dance. V.J. and his wife, Wilma, are familiar faces at most every

square dance around. When he is not calling, the two of them are dancing.

V.J. tells us about the role of the clogger or step dancer at the old-time dances. He explains the traditional "patter" call, which at one time predominated over the more modern singing call. V.J. also discusses the transition period when he saw a decline in square dancing, due to changing economic conditions and the introduction of new dance styles and the "Big Band" sounds.

V.J. Donaghy:

They used to walk for miles to go to a house party, and I guess sometimes they even danced one set in the house and one in the yard. My dad can tell about up in Custer Township, and there's a little house would set right in this room. And they had house parties there when they took the furniture right out doors. And Dad told me of going to some other neighbors' where it was a dirt floor, and probably one set at a time is all it could be. And it probably would be just one man on the fiddle or one on the banjo, and maybe some spoons or something. That's all the music they had.

They had to create their own fun. Times were a little tough, and there's always somebody in the neighborhood, two or three people, could play something. And that was their

music. They didn't use record players or radios. I can remember as a little boy when we moved up where we did, we didn't have electricity for two years. And [my dad] took the battery out of the car on Saturday night and brought it in, so we could listen to the "Grand Ole Opry." We only listened to it maybe like an hour or whatever, then we had to take it back and put it in the car, so the generator could charge it up.

I've been able to dance since the time I could walk. And my wife the same way. Wilma's father ran dances in Argyle. She'd be just a little girl. And they'd go to fill up the floor, and they'd be one short. And some of these men that's maybe ten years older would grab her, just as a kid, and she could square dance. And they tease her to this day about they might have to stop and go and change her diapers before they could continue square dancing. But we both danced all of our lives, and we learned how to dance properly. And we've tried to teach our kids the same, because they can do what the kids are doing now all by themselves.

Once in a while, supposing the party was a little on the small side, and there was room like, and they needed one set, they might get two of us kids in there. I can remember one that the little neighbor girl and myself, that they put us two kids in there and made us dance, or asked us to. And they showed us around. 'Course I imag-

ine we enjoyed it, and it helped them get through a dance.

I think a lot of dancing is built into you. You have to have a sense of rhythm, or you can't. There was quite a few - I called them "cloggers" - in those days. They'd stand right there, and do a jig, while the caller was waiting for his break to start. You start off on something lively; some man standing there ready to go would start right then, and they'd have to make him quit in order to start the square dance. This guy would be clogging his head off. But there was a lot of them would do that.

They have this pattern, which the old-timers always used. Some of those guys - they were comical to talk to. They had an expression for everything. Everything they said was comical. They tried to put some silly remark on the tail end of it. Well, that's just exactly what they do in patter calling. Like, "Chicken in the bread pan pickin' out dough; big foot up and little foot down; horse ran away with the harness dragging; and swing your little girl around and around, till the heel of your boot makes a hole in the ground." It's just something to occupy the time, to keep you in the beat. It has nothing to do with the dance whatsoever. "Home you go, don't be late. Swing that girl on the garden gate. Swing Ma

and swing Pa. Swing that girl from Arkansas." All of that is just garbage. It's just patter. They call it "patter" - thrown in. It's just like an auctioneer; you don't know half what he is saying, till he gets the bid. But that's what I was brought up on. The only reason I use it, because it's part of the tradition.

If you set and listen to it, pay attention, you can learn a call. Well, I could call. But like I always say, I used to do it some, and then I found out that while I was up there calling, somebody was dancing with my girlfriend. So I quit that stuff. I didn't call for thirty years pretty near after that. And I forgot a lot. And it's just gradually coming back.

I think this is the original call that I've heard. It's:

Places all.
Allemande left with your left hand.
Right with your partner,
The right and left grand.
Halfway around, promenade home.
Swing your pard a little bit hard.

The head two couples
Right and left through.
Right and left back.
Balance the floor
And balance back.
Change your ladies
And change them back.
Now balance the half
And sashay home.

Allemande left to your corner
lady.

Allemande right to your own.

All the way around boys,

All the way around.

The big foot up

And the little foot down.

Hurry up, gents.

You never get around.

Swing your pard a little bit hard.

Side two couples

Right and left through.

And right and left back.

Balance the floor.

Balance back.

Change your ladies

And change them back.

Now balance a half

And right and left back.

And home you go

With an allemande, Joe.

Allemande left with your left hand.

Right to your partner

And right and left grand.

All the way around boys.

Don't be late.

Swing your gal on the garden gate.

Swing your pard a little bit hard.

And then I oftentimes go right into the:

Ladies in the center,

Back to back.

Gents run around the outside track.

Single file, Indian style.

Bow to the one that you just swung.

Swing the next one, everyone.

And place your ladies

Back to back.

Gents run around the outside track.

Do si do with the one you swung.

Swing the next one, everyone.

Place your ladies

Back to back.

Gents run around the outside track.

Single file, Indian style.

Now allemande left with the one

you swung.

Swing the next one, everyone.

Allemande left with your left hand.

Right to your partner,

Right and left grand.

Now hurry up, boys.

Don't be laggin'.

Horse run away with the

harness draggin'.

Home you go, and

Swing your pard a little bit hard.

And that's the end of that one, or you
can go:

Halfway around and promenade.

You know where; I don't care.

Take your girl to a rocking chair.

That's the basic, the oldest call that
I know of. And I think other callers
almost agree.

There was a period of time in
there when I just don't think there
was too much square dancing going
on. Those people, the hardworking
people, they were struggling to make
a living right then. The enter-
tainment, I think, for a period of
time was the farthest from their
minds. There was a period in there
when, you know, right after the
Depression, where people were scrap-
ing to get on their feet, and the men
were working long hours, and they
just didn't feel like going to a
dance. They were tired. Worked
from daylight to dark. Where young

persons - we could care less. Work all day, but we're still going to go out all night; about the size of it.

But the dance was different then. The Depression was just getting over, and then started the "Big Band" sounds, as I grew up, you know. And we were dating. We wanted to hold a girl in your arms and dance. Had a little romance on your mind. And the square dance, you know, there isn't the romance involved in the square dance type of dance as the other kind. A little bit older, then I got married. Well, then you started having responsibilities, and you didn't go as much as before. ☐☐

Conclusion

The preceding stories present a variety of personal experiences, which illustrate the significance of traditional music and dance to the people of Michigan's Thumb Area. Activities such as the barn dance, the shivaree, and the community hall dance, were remembered, but it was the house party that dominated most Saturday nights for generations of rural families.

The house party provided an outlet for the creative energies of the musically talented. It served as a recreational opportunity and a vehicle for social interaction for people who labored.

Not all house parties were alike. They varied according to their respective neighborhoods, but there were common denominators, such as: informal invitations, relatively small groups of close-knit families and friends, a potluck lunch at midnight, square dancing to local callers and musicians, talking and card-playing, spirits in varying amounts (depending on the local attitudes), and early-morning conclusions, so that the folks could go home to milk the cows.

All of the musicians and callers here have indicated that they developed their interests through a process of observing and imitating accomplished performers, who served as models or informal teachers. Some of these artists have built upon their oral tradition by obtaining formal musical instruction privately and in schools. The result is a mixture of traditional and formal cultures in their music. In addition, many of the artists have indicated that records, radio and television have

affected their music. "The Grand Ole Opry" on Nashville's WSM, the WLS "National Barn Dance" out of Chicago, Wheeling's "Jamboree" on WWVA, and Canadian radio's Don Messer were some of the popular influences cited during the interviews.

For some, music was more than a diversion. These people have continued to perform throughout their lives. For others, music was set aside for periods of time to make way for more pressing priorities. Economic hardships and family obligations seem to have at least temporarily separated the music from many of its makers.

In the meantime, the traditional house party found competition as new passive forms of entertainment were introduced, such as motion pictures, commercial recordings and television. Increased availability of the automobile permitted more frequent travel beyond the neighborhood. New trends in popular music lured the younger audience from the old-time music. As time went on and homes were improved, folks were less willing to host the the regular house parties. Wall-to-wall carpets were not designed to be rolled and set aside for a dance, as was done with the old rag rugs. The return of the beer gardens after Prohibition, and the development of public dance halls also tended to erode the virtual monopoly on recreation once held by the house party.

As we have seen, a number of factors led to the demise of the house party. Unfortunately for so many traditional musicians, callers and dancers, the end of the house parties left very few opportunities for them to engage in their old-time music. Much talent has lain dormant for many years. Only recently have we begun to rediscover the homespun virtuosity of these folk artists. Now as a new generation looks to their forebears for time-tested artistic alternatives in their attempts to deal with contemporary life, we may see a new appreciation for Eastern Michigan's traditional music and its people, and their important role in our local heritage.